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Years of Potential Life Lost by Sex, Race, and Ethnicity North Carolina, 2000

by

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Premature deaths are a national problem and reduction of these deaths is an important objective for health policy. This study measures premature mortality in terms of years of potential life lost (YPLL), by considering the number of potential years left to live at each age of death.

Methods: For each North Carolina resident who died in 2000, the remaining life expectancy at the time of death was summed to calculate the total YPLL for the major causes of death. Deaths were ranked by number of deaths and by YPLL for the total population, males, females, Whites, African Americans, American Indians, other races, Hispanics, and non-Hispanics. Average YPLL per death was also calculated.

Results: Heart disease, cancer, and cerebrovascular disease rank high on both total number of deaths and YPLL. Causes where more young people are dying rank higher on YPLL than on number of deaths. For example, unintentional motor vehicle injuries was the ninth leading cause of death in 2000 for number of deaths, but it ranked third based on YPLL. African Americans have relatively high rankings on YPLL for perinatal conditions, homicide, and HIV disease. The relatively young age of the Hispanic population in North Carolina means that their average YPLL per death is much higher than for the non-Hispanic population, including causes of death normally associated with older people.

Conclusions: Calculating YPLL is a useful means for assessing the impact of deaths at younger ages. Preventing premature deaths is consistent with the national Healthy People 2010 objectives, and should be a major priority of public health programs in North Carolina.

